



HEALTH AWARENESS

Dealing With Dryness

(NAPSA)—If you ever suffer from dryness symptoms, especially of the mouth and eyes, you may have a serious medical condition known as Sjögren's syndrome (pronounced SHOW-grins). It's an autoimmune disease that attacks the moisture-producing glands of the body. To highlight this disease and its symptoms, April has been designated as Sjögren's syndrome awareness month.

Sjögren's syndrome affects one to four million Americans. Ninety percent of them are women, with the onset of disease occurring, on average, in the fifth and sixth decades of life. Classic symptoms are dryness of the mouth and eyes, although patients may also experience dryness of the skin, nose, and vagina. Sjögren's syndrome is often associated with other autoimmune disorders, such as rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus.

Because Sjögren's syndrome affects the salivary glands, people with this disease may develop oral complications. Saliva does more than just keep the mouth moist—it's important for tasting, chewing, swallowing, speaking, digestion and oral health. Unlike water, saliva contains a variety of salts, proteins, carbohydrates and fats, which, when combined, provide its protective abilities. When the salivary glands are not functioning properly, the principal oral symptom is a feeling of dryness. Fortunately, many of the symptoms can be treated. Prescription medications are available that increase salivary flow, providing relief from dryness of the mouth.

Signs of salivary gland dysfunction may include:

- Swelling around the ear and/or lower jaw, where saliva-producing glands are located
- Dry, sticky mouth
- Tooth decay
- Sores at the corners of the mouth
- Plaque buildup
- Infections in the mouth



Additional tips for oral comfort include:

- Taking frequent, small sips of water or sucking on ice chips
- Drinking beverages that are sugar-free
- Chewing sugarless gum or gum containing xylitol (a sugar substitute)
- Avoiding acidic and spicy foods
- Limiting coffee, tea, and other caffeinated beverages, as well as alcohol
- Avoiding foods high in sugar
- Maintaining good oral hygiene
- Brushing teeth before and after eating
- Flossing daily
- Visiting the dentist at least three times each year

It may also be helpful to participate in support groups. These provide a forum for sharing experiences and learning about how others manage the disease. Often, just knowing you're not alone can be a great source of comfort.

You can learn more on the Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation Web site at www.sjogrens.org. Also, talk to your doctor about your dryness symptoms to learn how you can find relief.

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